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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iraq - President Bush
Speeches - Eavesdropping Controversy Bolivian Elections
PARIS - Tuesday, December 20, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iraq - President Bush Speeches - Eavesdropping Controversy
Bolivian Elections

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Most front pages are devoted to domestic economic and social stories. Le Monde alone leads with "Bush On the Defensive Over Iraq and Eavesdropping Charges." But many inside reports are devoted to the President's attempt to defend his Iraq policy. Regional Le Progres comments in its editorial: "The war against terror justifies all, or practically all. And the only shameful thing about listening in on U.S. citizens is revealing it to the enemy." In regional La Montagne Dominique Vales concludes: "Bush says that the U.S. economy is the 'envy of the world.' Not his Iraq policy for sure." (See Part C)

The Bolivian elections are widely covered. Le Figaro devotes a full page to the election of Bolivia's "first Indian" to the Presidency. Jean-Louis Turlin reports on Evo Morales, "Washington's nightmare." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

"Bush On the Defensive Over Iraq and Eavesdropping"
Corine Lesnes in left-of-center Le Monde (12/20): "Interests diverge between President Bush and Congress. For George Bush, America's fate is linked to the fate of Iraq. and he is urging his fellow citizens to be patient. For the Republicans in Congress, on the contrary, time is running out. The power that the President conferred on himself on September 11, 2001 is being called into question by his own party. George Bush is multiplying his confessions to the American public. In his speech on December 18, George Bush did not put forward a new strategy and those who were hoping that he would present a timetable for troop withdrawal from Iraq were disappointed."

"Iraq, Terrorism, Eavesdropping: Bush Defends His Strategy"
Jacques Hubert-Rodier in right-of-center Les Echos (12/20): "Bush is increasingly on the defensive and in a free fall in opinion ratings. Hence his many attempts these last few days to defend not only his decision to invade Iraq but also his having authorized telephone surveillance without going through the justice system. Every time, his message has been the same, on Iraq and troop withdrawal. He was most aggressive over the NSA eavesdropping set up."

"War Justifies All, Almost."
Francis Brochet in regional Le Progres (12/20): "The war against terrorism justifies everything, or almost everything. For example it justifies putting hundreds or maybe even thousands of U.S. citizens under telephone surveillance. And if there is anything to be ashamed of, it is of revealing this to the enemy. 'We are at war' says again and again the American President. A bizarre war indeed, waged in the name of democracy, but all the while denying the principles of democracy. And authorizing torture. with the following explanation: 'We are sending a message to the world that says we are not like the terrorists.' Bush is not like Ben Laden. Of course, he isn't, we all know that. But it would be good if Bush sent the message and the proof to the rest of the world."

"The U.S. Economy and Iraq."
Dominique Vales in regional La Montagne (12/20): "The torture methods adopted by the CIA, the 'secret prisons,' the international telephone surveillance and even the renewal of the Patriot Act are triggering growing protest. This protest is now reaching into the ranks of Republican Congressmen, who are worried about their own re-election next November. Bush contends that the U.S. economy is the 'envy of the world.' This is certainly not the case for his Iraq policy."

Bolivian Elections

"Evo Morales, Washington's `Nightmare'"

Jean-Louis Turlin in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/20): "Hugo Chavez was the first foreign leader to congratulate his `protg,' Evo Morales. Chavez never wastes an opportunity to taunt his North American neighbor, whose reaction to the Bolivian election was obviously slow to come and much less enthusiastic. These elections do not occupy the front pages of the U.S. media. They were not mentioned by the President during his press conference yesterday. Nevertheless they could represent the latest reversal in Washington's Latin American n backyard. Like the NY Times said, President Bush is so busy in Iraq, that he may now be harvesting the fruits of his lack of interest for the Latin American continent. Washington's global concerns symbolized by the Chavez-Castro anti-imperialistic axis may well be re-enforced with the arrival of Morales. With a number of elections programmed in Latin America from Brazil, to Mexico and Ecuador, Washington will try to neutralize the likes of Chavez and Morales. Meanwhile, Morales has made his plans clear: cordial relations with the U.S., but no submission."

"An Indian President For Bolivia"

Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de La Manche (12/20): "For the first time an Indian has been elected to lead Bolivia. It could well be that while he is fighting in Iraq, Bush is beginning to discover that he is losing ground in Latin America. It is certain that in the near future new tensions will arise between Bolivia and the U.S. It may be the end of a certain type of leadership."

"The Hopes of the Bolivian People"

Patrick Apel-Muller in communist l'Humanite (12/20): "This victory is not an accident. Progressive forces are on the move in Latin America, fighting against the American sheriff who continues to consider the region his backyard. Despite his loss of popular support in his own country and abroad, President Bush continues to have his eyes on the oil reserves of Latin America and the Middle East." STAPLETON